



# THE GULL

Golden Gate Audubon Society

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## GREEN HIGHWAYS THROUGH URBAN DESSERTS: RIPARIAN CORRIDORS AND BIRD MIGRATION

Mike Rigney, Director of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station, will summarize ten years worth of observations and bird banding work along Coyote Creek at our February program in Berkeley. The program will begin at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, February 11, 1993 at the Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda. The Station bands over 7,000 birds a year, and more than 140 different species of birds have been banded over the past ten years. Mike's slide show will include photos of some of the rarities encountered during banding, and a discussion of the successful riparian restoration work and other projects that the Station is involved in.

Coyote Creek Riparian Station was formed in 1982 to do long-term studies on riparian wildlife. Central to this study has been an intensive bird banding program manned primarily by volunteers. Many of these are Audubon members from local Bay Area chapters. Coyote Creek Riparian Station is currently assisting government agencies to determine success criteria for riparian management projects. It is an active participant in the Partners in Flight Program, which focuses monitoring and management attention on neotropical migratory songbirds. Other activities include working with the EPA to establish techniques for citizen monitoring of riparian habitats.

Mike Rigney took over the directorship of the Coyote Creek Riparian Station in 1990. Prior to this, he co-founded the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, and also served as its first director. Mike also was a wildlife biologist for the H.T. Harvey and Associates consulting firm, and has been involved in bird research for 15 years.

— JOELLE BUFFA  
Program Committee Chairman

## FIELD TRIPS CALENDAR

**Saturday, February 6**—Lake Merced, San Francisco. Leader: Naomi Sveningsen (415/584-6233).

**Wednesday, February 10**—Mini-trip to Coyote Hills Regional Park. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510/351-9301) and Jean-Marie Spoelman.

For details on the above, see *The GULL* for January.

**Saturday, February 20**—Briones Regional Park. Meet at 8 a.m. at the west entrance to Briones Regional Park (off Bear Creek Rd.). Take Hwy 24 east and exit on the Orinda turnoff, then turn left and go back under the freeway on Camino Pablo. Continue northwest about two miles to Bear Creek Rd. Turn right and drive about 4.5 miles to the Briones Regional Park entrance on the right, (just beyond Happy Valley Rd.). Or, from Berkeley area, cross through Tilden Regional Park on Wildcat Canyon Rd. and continue across San Pablo Dam Rd. onto Bear Creek Rd. 4.5 miles to the park.

Meet in the parking area on the left just beyond the fee booth. Bring lunch and liquids. We will hike in hilly terrain looking for wintering birds, Western Bluebirds, Acorn Woodpeckers, Pine Siskins, and lots more. Leader: Rusty Scalf (510/523-7108). \$ (✓)

**Wednesday, March 10**—Mini-trip to Mitchell Canyon. We will meet at

9:30 a.m. Take Hwy 24 through the Caldecott Tunnel. At Walnut Creek take Ygnacio Valley Rd. exit. Go approximately 8 miles, then turn right onto Clayton Rd. Go one mile and make a right onto Mitchell Canyon Rd. and proceed to the parking lot at the end of the road. This is a delightful area with easy streamside walking and many songbirds. Wear shoes suitable for walking in mud, and bring your lunch. Rain cancels trip. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510/351-9301) and Jean-Marie Spoelman.

### Plan Ahead:

**Sunday, March 14**—Tennessee Cove. Leader: Betty Short (415/921-3020, work)

**Saturday, March 20**—San Francisco Bird Blitz. Leader: Alan Hopkins (415/664-0983).

**Sunday, March 21**—Monterey Pelagic Trip, see p. 26 for details.

See next issue of *The GULL* for details on above trips.

**Trips marked with \$** go to parks and other sites that require an entrance fee.

**Carpooling** arrangements will be attempted for trips marked (✓).

**Problems:** if you need a ride or can take a passenger, or if you need information and have difficulty reaching a field trip leader, call Russ Wilson, Field Trips Committee Chmn. (510/524-2399).

— FIELD TRIPS COMMITTEE

Send address changes to office promptly; Post office does not forward *THE GULL*. Monthly meetings: second Thursday, 7:30 p.m. Joint membership — local and national \$30 per year (individual); \$38 (family); includes *AUDUBON* Magazine and *THE GULL*; to join, make checks payable to National Audubon Society and send to GGAS office to avoid delay in receiving *THE GULL*. Membership renewals should be sent directly to the National Audubon office. Subscriptions to *THE GULL* separately \$10 per year; single issues \$1. High school and college student membership \$20 per year. Senior citizen individual \$21, senior citizen family \$23. Associate Membership in Golden Gate Audubon Society, \$10 per year.

The Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc. was established January 15, 1917,  
and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948.

The *Gull* deadline is the first of the month for the following month, and July 15th for September issue.

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## DECEMBER OBSERVATIONS

Interesting seabirds are in short supply in the winter around here — there are fewer individuals around and fewer boats setting off in search of them. What's glimpsed is mostly what's close enough to be seen from shore and although land-lubbing birders might consider rock-solid ground preferable to a rocking boat, there are some drawbacks, mainly distance. Most of these fly-bys are specks, even in a Questar. An expert can fairly reliably call a black and white shearwater speck a Black-vented, but it's hardly a rewarding look; likewise murrelets, although they may sit on the water a little closer to land than shearwaters fly. What brings this up is the fact that Christmas Bird Counts that include the outer coast send out boats when possible but tend to rely on posted watchers who spend the day scanning the sea resulting in a flurry of reports from north and south: Northern Fulmars, Sooty, Short-tailed and Black-vented Shearwaters, Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Pigeon Guillemots, Marbled and Ancient Murrelets, and Rhinoceros Auklets. Very unseasonal was an Elegant Tern seen from Bolinas on the 27th (PP). A **Yellow-billed Loon** was found at the mouth of Alameda Creek on the 20th and was reported through the 24th (DRi, RJR, MiF). These birds often stay around for a longish period, but this individual was a six-mile walk or bike-ride from the nearest auto access which may have deterred some seekers.

There were upwards of a hundred and twenty Cattle Egrets reported from far and wide. A Barnacle Goose in San Leandro had observers a-twitter, but

cynical old-hands deemed it a probable escape. This species, like the Emperor Goose, is found along rocky shorelines, which makes its appearance on a golf course in the company of Canada Geese suspect; in addition, it breeds no closer than Greenland and winters in Europe, and eastern North American records south of Labrador are generally discounted. Unusual ducks, geese and swans, so often bred and raised in captivity, are always a difficult call; anyone wishing to validate a sighting must first ascertain that there haven't been any recent escapes of captive-raised birds and then must establish a "pattern of occurrence"—a record of accepted intermediate sightings between known areas of occurrence and the present location. Hence Barnacle Geese would have to have been recorded in Alaska as well as more northerly points along the west coast for this bird to stand a chance of being judged a naturally occurring individual. Ducks included the pair of Tufted Ducks in San Francisco (mob); Harlequin Ducks at Monterey (mob), Pt. Reyes (TEa) and Wilder Ranch in Santa Cruz (LCh); a female King Eider at Humboldt Bay (GSL fide PEL, GjH); a total of six Oldsquaws including one in Redding (BY); and numerous Eurasian Wigeons.

The **Wilson's Plover** was last reported from Moss landing on the 5th (JSC). At least one Rock Sandpiper continued to be seen at Princeton Harbor (mob); another was reported from Estero Americano, south of Bodega Bay (JCo). A Ruff was in Alviso on the 20th (MJM fide PJM). There was a total of seven Glaucous Gulls, from immature to adult, from Mendocino to San Joaquin Counties.

Up to six Swainson's Hawks in Kings County on the 28th were much out of place (MP, RSa) — this time of year

they're found in the Argentinian Pampas, not the Central Valley of California.

There was a White-winged Dove in Pescadero on the 26th (RSTh). Hummingbirds included a Costa's in Hayward (DH, RJR) and a Rufous in Berkeley (DRW). There were Lewis' Woodpeckers in good numbers in Yolo and Solano Counties; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker individuals in San Francisco (ASH, KG), Contra Costa (JE), San Mateo (fide AME, RSTh, DPo, SBT), and Pt. Reyes Station (JW, DDeS); a Red-naped Sapsucker in Berkeley (NB fide DEQ); and the same Williamson's Sapsucker continued at Tomales Bay State Park (JCo, mob). Flycatchers, hardly a wintry species, were here: Dusky in San Francisco (ASH); Pacific-slope in Pescadero (RSTh); Dusky-capped in Santa Cruz (mob), El Granada (BS, MiF, RSTh), Bolinas (RS, mob), and Pacific Grove, two of them, (DR, DSg, SBT); Ash-throated in Sacramento (WEH); and Eastern Phoebes at Coyote Creek (PJM, MiF, MJM, MMR) and Bolinas (JsC).

Townsend's Solitaire, a mountain species that generally shows up in small numbers each winter, was reported only from Mines Road (RJR). There was a Gray Catbird in Humboldt County (GjH); and a Sage Thrasher seemed to have settled in Alameda (ALE, mob). And unusual warblers, reasonably scarce commodities in the winter, were hardly abundant, but were present in gratifying diversity.

Tennessee Warbler:

San Francisco (PJM)

Nashville Warbler:

San Francisco (DSg, PJM)  
(4 total)

San Mateo (RSTh, AME)  
(5 total)

Lucy's Warbler:

Bodega Bay (mob)

Yellow Warbler:

San Francisco (DSg)

Chestnut-sided Warbler:

Coyote Creek (MJM, PJM)

Palm Warbler:

Point Reyes (RS, TEa, fide DWm)  
(2 total)

San Francisco (ASH)

Black-and-White Warbler:

Berkeley (DFW)

Pescadero (RSTh)

Bolinas (RS)

American Redstart:

San Francisco (ASH, ABi)

Santa Cruz (LCh)

Ovenbird:

San Francisco (DPM, HW, LLu)

Northern Waterthrush:

San Jose (PJM)

Wilson's Warbler:

San Francisco (DSg, PJM)

(2 total)

Marin County (fide DSi)

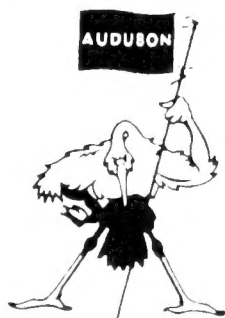
There were four Summer Tanagers in San Francisco (ASH, DSg, MiF, JBH, ABi, DPM, IvS); and Western Tanagers in Menlo Park (PJM) and Marin (fide DiS). A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, first found at Stinson Beach in October, was tallied on the Southern Marin Christmas Bird Count (RS) on the 27th. There was an Indigo Bunting at Elkhorn Slough on Jan. 1 (PJM).

Good numbers of Swamp Sparrows and White-throated Sparrows were reported; also a Clay-colored Sparrow at Half Moon Bay (DPo, CMi, SBT); a Grasshopper Sparrow at Año Nuevo (GJS fide RSTh); and a Sharp-tailed Sparrow at Palo Alto (NiL, AME). There was a Lapland Longspur at Point Reyes on the 30th (JEP) and a Rusty Blackbird at Scott Creek (Santa Cruz County) from November 24 thru December 1 (GJS fide RSTh). A total of five Northern Orioles were reported. A Cassin's Finch on Mines Road on the 28th (RJR) and scattered Red Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks round out the month.

**OBSERVERS:** Florence G. Bennett, Andrew Birch, Nancy Boas, Les Chivana, Josiah Clark, John Comstock, J. Scott Cox, Dave DeSante, Ann Dewart, Todd Easterla, Arthur L. Edwards, Alan M. Eisner, Lee Elias, Mike Feighner, D. French, Frank Gardner, David Hamilton, W. Edward Harper, J.B. Havens, Gjon Hazard, Bob Hirt, Alan S. Hopkins, Paul E. Lehman, Gary S. Lester, Nick Lethaby, Leslie Lieurance, Michael J. Mammoser, Roger Marlowe, Peter J. Metropulos, Carol Miller, Joe Morlan, Dan P. Murphy, John E. Parmeter, Michael Perrone, David Powell, Lina J. Prairie, Peter Pyle, David E. Quady, Jean M. Richmond, Robert J. Richmond, Alan Ridley, Dave Riensche, Don Roberson, John Robinson, Mike M. Rogers, Ruth A. Rudesill, Robert Saecker, Ivan Samuels, Barry Sauppe, Dianne Sierra, Dan Singer, Rich Stallcup, Gary J. Strachan, Scott B. Terrill, Ronald S. Thorn, Dorothy Tobkin, Harry White, Anna Wilcox, David Wimpfheimer, Jon Winter, Dennis F. Wolff, David G. Yee, Bob Yutzy. Data thanks to Joe Morlan and the Northern California Rare Bird Alert.

—ANN DEWART

*You can be an*



*Armchair Activist*

## SHOREBIRD ROOSTS HIGH TIDE DILEMMA

Our remaining wetlands and Bay shallows are favorite locations for birding classes and field trips to gather, giving every participant an opportunity to see a wide selection of birds. High tides reveal marsh secrets, as rails and small birds and mammals are forced from their shelter by rising waters. High tides also cause the mud flat feeders to seek higher ground for refuge until the invertebrate filled pudding is unveiled again by receding waters.

Shorebirds can be seen in large close groups during high tides: preening, resting, sleeping, conserving heat and energy with bills tucked and one leg pulled into warm feathers, alert to predators and other risks, and some still feeding. There has been very little research done here to identify the local roost locations or the function of roosts in the daily cycle of tideline birds. However, if we consider sleeping, grooming and feeding important to an organism, we could presume that undisturbed high tide roosts are essential to the good health of our shorebirds. Erick Hosking's book, *Waders*, claims that good roosts are as important to the birds as good feeding areas.

Studies in England have shown that larger shorebirds tend to congregate at roost sites first, while the smaller peeps are the last to join the flock. This may have something to do with metabolic needs of the smaller birds requiring longer feeding periods. Observations in the Bay Area have revealed similar tendencies. Roost studies have also shown that spatial dynamics vary for each species of bird. Dunlins, for instance, are spaced farther apart than Red Knots at the roost. Vocalization and flashing flights are considered mechanisms to advertise a roost location, calling in as many shorebirds as possible. The conspicuous activity of shorebirds at roosts were once confus-



ing to biologists, who considered it would be an announcement to predators, but the benefits of calling in smaller bands of birds to create a larger roost flock actually protects the birds against predation. "Safety in numbers" may have first been prophesied along the shore.

Sub roosts have also been identified in England and become the final roost only on the lowest of high tides, as highest tides will flood sub roost sites forcing the birds to higher yet dry ground. The importance of sub roosts is not clear, but it appears that birds prefer staying as close to the water as possible.

Although there are large expanses of mudflats available to feeding shorebirds along the East Bay, there are no areas protected for shorebirds during high tide. They rest where they can until disturbed by playful dogs; children rushing at them in awe and wonder of the flush; joggers, thoughts elsewhere, running through the flock; the fishing enthusiast claiming the roost as the best casting spot; or the beach stroller approaching too close unaware that they are stepping into an important high tide shorebird bed. These roosts are rare enough in urban areas, and where they do exist they are often too small during the tides exceeding 7 feet. Once while conducting a clapper rail census at Emeryville Crescent, Lina Prairie and I looked with amazement at dowitchers landing on the backs of Marbled Godwits and Willets for lack of space on the high ground as the waters pushed toward the freeway. That the larger birds did not object to the high tide riders bewildered us.

Roost disturbances are all too common a topic of discussion among birders during a trip to the shore. GGAS is now prepared to approach East Bay Regional Park District and other land managers responsible for areas that host large numbers of roosting shorebirds with a

concept of creating protected safe-zones for known important roosts. Bird sanctuaries along the shore must consider that roosts are as important to the preserve as the mudflat. If you are aware of an important roost for shorebirds north of San Mateo Bridge and south of the Richmond/San Rafael Bridge, give me a call. Roosts in Hayward shoreline, San Leandro Bay, South Shore in Alameda, and Emeryville Crescent are well documented, but there are others less well known that we should map and try to protect. Roosts are frequently not considered in environmental assessments, another good reason to document them and come to better understand their value. This limited area between bridges is just a beginning, but covers an important urban shoreline used by thousands if not millions of shorebirds. Protecting wetlands has been difficult; protecting roosts, though so important to birds, will provide an even greater challenge.

—LEORA FEENEY  
(510) 522-8525

## MONTEREY PELAGIC TRIP

The Golden Gate Audubon Society will sponsor a boat trip on *Sunday, March 21* to view seabirds and marine mammals. We plan a 7:30 a.m. departure from Monterey Harbor. Past trips have produced sightings of albatross, shearwaters, jaegers, alcids, dolphin, whales and other species not usually seen from land. Reservations may be made by sending \$30 per person to Golden Gate Audubon Society, Suite G, Berkeley, California 94702. Make checks payable to Golden Gate Audubon Society and enclose a self addressed stamped envelope. Details on when and where to meet will be mailed with confirmation notices. For more information call GGAS office at 843-2222.

## CONSERVATION NOTES

### INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

Beginning with May 8, 1993, a newly designated International Migratory Bird Day will be celebrated on the second Saturday of May each year. Individuals and organizations throughout the Western Hemisphere will participate in activities dedicated toward the conservation of all migratory birds—song birds, shore birds, raptors and waterfowl. More than 330 species of birds embark on annual migrations across the Americas.

The International Migratory Bird Day will provide the platform for numerous conservation efforts already underway through Partners in Flight - Aves de las Americas program. The concern of all organizations involved, from government agencies to NGOs, will be taken to the press, public and legislators.

The GGAS Conservation Committees are currently planning exciting events to take place May 7-8 to celebrate this important day. If you have ideas or would like to be involved please call the office. Meanwhile, read *The GULL* for updates and make every day a Migratory Bird Day:

- Create and protect habitat for birds on your property. Don't use pesticides, reduce window reflection, keep cats inside, maintain healthy trees - but save the dead one for cavity-nesters.
- Put less pressure on our forests - recycle paper, use recycled paper products and don't buy hardwood products.
- Support sustainable agriculture - buy food that was grown without harm to the environment.
- Support Legislation that protects our environment from harmful chemicals, bans the disposal of wastes in oceans, acts to reduce air pollution, ensures the survival of forests and maintains biodiversity.
- Become involved with the Breeding Bird Atlas project and GGAS Conservation Committee.

—PAULA KLEINTJES,

(Some of the above was reprinted with permission from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center.)

### EDGEWOOD AGAIN

When the San Mateo County supervisors voted four to one last May to declare Edgewood Park a preserve, most thought the issue was closed. But is it ever? On Aug. 25 three of five Supervisors voted for Sup. Tim Nolan's proposal for a golf course feasibility study for one third of Edgewood, with two-thirds of the park set aside as a preserve. This would probably mean that the flat serpentine meadows would be sacrificed, destroying the habitat of the federally protected Bay Checkerspot Butterfly. You can write to Supervisors: Mary Griffin, protesting her change of position, Tom Huening, Ruben Varreles and Mike Nevin urging their continued support for Edgewood. The address is 401 Marshall St., Redwood City, CA 94603. For more information call Save Edgewood Park Coalition at (415) 326-2726.

A vacancy on the Board means that no dramatic action will occur until the May election.

As usual much more than a butterfly is at stake. The area is a wildflower wonder.

### PAPAGENO SF PROJECT

Mrs. Muriel Leff, who has been joined by ten volunteers, has named her effort to supply nursing homes, hospices, and shut-ins with birdfeeders after the colorful figure from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

Call her at (415) 221-9988, if you would like to help. Contributions in support of this program may be made by sending a check payable to GGAS (and thus, tax deductible) and identified as "Papageno Project." She has placed both seed and hummingbird feeders, and plans to keep them in service. Your help is invited.

Is anyone interested in an East Bay Papageno Project?

## BACKYARD BIRDER

I saw *IT*! Actually, I saw *two* American Black Oystercatchers at Bodega Head. What comical-looking birds they are, resembling Groucho Marx with an orange-red cigar in his mouth. If it weren't for their bills you might miss them since they blend with the wet, wave-washed rocks on which they perch or stroll.

My Bodega Bay photo album, the one in my mind, is growing quickly since we finished our weekend home in August. In just a few weekends I've collected some sharp images. No wonder the area is such a magnet for birders and nature lovers.

Our wall of windows offers an unobstructed view of the bay itself plus the ocean and the profile of Bodega Head. Sunsets were simply spectacular this fall (side benefit of dust particles and such in the air). One night I wished I were good with a camera. A small bat, silhouetted black against the red sky danced silently like a large butterfly past the window. Click! It's in my album.

The Bodega kitchen window rivals my kitchen window at home for entertainment. There are sweeping views of the hills, newly-carpeted in green velvet. One early morning after light rain thousands of shorebirds (Dunlin, Sanderlings and various sandpipers) settled on the golf course fairway. I tried to creep close for better identification but the sentry bird alerted the flock and they wheeled away as one huge body of birds. Back at the sink, I watched as they settled uneasily on the grass, a vast sea of birds on land.

One of the resident Northern Harriers spooked the flock. I read that harriers will take small birds but that they mainly feed upon mice, rats, frogs, small snakes and lizards, many insects and carrion. The spooky flock is well-advised to beware of any hawk-like shape since the local Peregrine Falcons terrorized the shorebirds. Witnessing one of these "bullets" streaking toward a flock is an awesome, if somewhat chilling, sight. No wonder birds fly in such tight formation, changing direction in an instant with no

warning. It would seem nearly impossible for any predator to pick out a single individual. But the element of surprise coupled with a falcon's blinding speed, gives the Peregrine a fighting chance at a meal.

American Water Pipits, uncommon at home, stroll my yard, Yellow-rumped Warblers abound, a Great Horned Owl hoots, all sorts of raptors soar above the moor-like hills. There's a kestrel every hundred feet along the highway perched on telephone wires. New-born lambs and calves dot the pasture land. Turkey Vultures teeter in the sky as they scan the menu below. It's a veritable feast for the eyes. Can't wait till spring migration!

—MEG PAULETICH

## FROM THE MUD DOES NOT GROW THE LOTUS

(from "WINGING IT" in the *Bodega Bay Navigator*, Oct. 29, 1992)

"I wish we would be focusing our activities more on the issue of biodiversity and its loss."

"My worst fear isn't that we're putting something up in the atmosphere...because if we are we can stop. No, my worst fear is that the world is going to hell."

These were two comments made by Dr. David Wake, director of the UC Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in an article written by Robert Hurwitt titled "Ribbit & Weep" (*East Bay Express*, July 31, 1992).

Dr. Wake is a highly regarded evolutionary biologist and an expert in the study of amphibians. In recent years he has been associated with others who have studied the data and put forth the alarming and puzzling facts that point to the notion that the world's frogs may be dying off.

"Not frogs everywhere," explains Hurwitt, "but a great variety of species in widely scattered parts of the globe (exhibit) precipitous population declines, some to the point of extinction. And



nobody knows why.'"

I don't know Dr. Wake personally, but I do know of the other three scientists who contributed their thoughts to this article.

When I first began birding in the late 1970s while living in Berkeley, I used to spend several mornings a week walking in Tilden Regional Park. I especially liked the Pack Rat Trail above the Environmental Center, and I would often join or be joined by a man who seemed to know everything there was to know about nature. One day we introduced ourselves and when he told me his name, Bob Stebbins, I felt very humble. His *Western Reptiles and Amphibians* in the Peterson series is the definitive field guide on the subject, and his illustrations are nothing short of miraculous.

Margaret Kelley was the naturalist at the Environmental Center, and was very helpful to me when I became editor of the GGAS publication *The GULL*. She is now supervising naturalist for the entire East Bay Regional Parks District.

Gary Fellers is a research biologist with the National Parks Service who is stationed at Point Reyes. I provided him with some numbers during a survey he did in this area on Brant; he is also with a task force that is studying frog populations.

Each of these experts spoke about their observations relating to the disappearance of known amphibian colonies of various species. While possible reasons for this were cited, ranging everywhere from drought to acid rain (and let's not leave out feral cats), the worst villain, as usual, was The Human, especially in regard to population pressures.

Frogs migrate from land to water along historic paths, and those have been built on or disrupted by roads. Pesticides and fertilizers wash into streams and rivers. Forests are cut down. Simply the sheer bulk of humans on the Earth has exterminated, evidently, vast numbers of frogs.

So what?

Dr. Stebbins uses the frog as the miner's canary: "If frogs stop calling... be aware something's happening."

Which finally brings me to birds, if you've followed me this far.

This is what Margaret Kelley said, talking about my well-known and beloved nature area in Tilden Park: "We have definitely seen a decline of both amphibians and reptiles here... but the decline is general. Hummingbirds: we used to have six mating pairs in the Tilden Nature Area; now we're down to one pair. Songbirds are suffering population stress from too much background noise. They forget how to make nests, lay sterile eggs; they can't establish territory because their songs are drowned out by noise."

If an area's biotic population in a place as seemingly natural and protected as that referred to by Kelley can suffer so radically from human intrusion, perhaps Dr. Wake's second comment at the beginning of this column doesn't seem so extreme.

I'll leave you with one last reflection from him: "Species are a continuum. Yes, we can probably limp along (losing one specimen or another), but we are losing everything, folks."

Be careful out there.

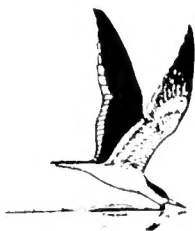
Think.

—NANCY T. CONZETT

## SINCEREST FLATTERY

In our mail this week was a letter from the newly organized North American Butterfly Association (NABA) which may be of interest to GGAS members. The NABA is concerned with the field aspects of "butterflying," including field identification (with binoculars), listing, gardening, photography and conservation. It will publish a quarterly journal, *American Butterflies*, and invites contributions. It will hold an annual count on the Fourth of July beginning this year.

For membership, (\$15 individuals, \$25 families and institutions), or more information write Dr. Jeffrey Glassberg, 39 Highland Ave., Chappaqua NY 10514.



## BANDED BLACK SKIMMER

Please report any banded Black Skimmer to Dr. Charles Collins, Dept. of Biology, California State University, Long Beach, CA 90840-3702 or phone (310) 985-4813.

Collins is heading a study of the skimmer's colony at Bolsa Chica. These birds have been seen as far north as Moss Landing. Right legs will have a colored band, left will have aluminum. Please note the color and any numbers or letters you can read. (illustration by Jonathan Alderfer.)

## BIRD FEEDING: BOON OR BANE?

*Does the extra food we provide help some species to increase in numbers - at the expense of others?*

Are people who feed birds unwittingly causing the decline of migratory bird populations? According to Project Feeder Watch, a winter bird feeding survey sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the answer seems to be no.

Concern for migratory birds has been mounting in recent years. Surveys suggest that many populations have declined seriously over the past decade. In his recent book, *Where Have All the Birds Gone?*, ornithologist John Terbough discusses possible causes.

He mentions deforestation on the neotropical wintering grounds and fragmentation of breeding habitat in North America, which most biologists agree are the main problems. But he suggests that bird feeding may be a worry as well. He wonders whether feeders may be causing increases in birds such as the Brown-headed Cowbird, which are nest parasites, or Blue Jays, which are notable nest robbers. If so, he reasons,

then bird feeding may be inadvertently contributing to the declines of many forest-dwelling species, such as warblers and vireos, that never even visit feeders.

To examine this possibility, Cornell ornithologist Erica H. Dunn turned to information from Project Feeder Watch as well as data from the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), a continent-wide survey of bird numbers in spring. She used the Feeder Watch data to determine which feeder species are most widespread in North America, and BBS data to learn which of them had been increasing and which had been decreasing during the past 25 years.

Surprisingly, she discovered that 70% of the most widespread feeder birds showed significantly declining populations. These included not only the nest-robbing Blue Jay, but also such nest-site competitors as European Starling and House Sparrow, as well as other species often considered "pests." The Brown-headed Cowbird also declined, although not as much as many others. These findings don't mean these species are not hurting migratory birds through their predatory or parasitizing actions, but it does suggest that feeding them is not increasing their population.

These observations raise another question: Is bird feeding bad for bird populations? Are species such as the Blue Jay being hurt by the practice?

Probably not. Most of the declining feeder species belong to groups that are declining as a whole—even some species in those groups that don't visit feeders. These include the mimids (thrashers and mockingbirds) towhees, certain blackbirds, and sparrows — birds that nest primarily in grasslands or shrub habitats, which are also declining.

Bird feeding may harm some species, however. One study in England showed that regular feeding induced some Blue Tits and Great Tits to nest in suburban areas rather than their natural habitat, deciduous woodland. The suburban nesters showed very poor reproductive success because natural foods, especial-

ly insects needed to feed nestlings, were in short supply. We don't know whether Blue Jays were responding to feeding by nesting in suburbia, only to suffer insupportable predation by cats and raccoons. We do know that American Robins, which often nest in suburbia, are showing population increases nationwide.

Conclusive evidence for the effects of bird feeding on bird populations awaits more detailed studies of each species. Meanwhile, bird feeding does not seem to cause increases in most species that frequent feeders, including "pest" species.

If you feed birds in your backyard and you'd like to contribute to the international effort to monitor bird populations, now is the time to sign up for the 1992-93 Feeder Watch season. Participants receive a complete instruction packet, data forms, and a subscription to Feeder Watch News, a biannual newsletter that covers not only Feeder Watch results, but bird feeding tips, notes on feeder behavior, and more. For information, or to join, write to Project Feeder Watch, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca NY 14850. (From *Feeder Watch News*, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Autumn 92.)

## MAY WE UP-GRADE TO YOUR OLD COMPUTER?

Did Santa bring you a new computer for Christmas? If so, what will you do with your old one?

We would welcome donation of a PC if it is a 286 SX 25 or better. We use a PC in the office for membership records, mailing lists, Christmas Bird Count records, accounting, and such mundane things as word-processing. If you, or your company have something we could put to use, please call the GGAS office (510) 843-2222. Gifts to GGAS are tax deductible to the full extent provided by law.

## NOTES ACCOMPANYING GIFTS:

San Francisco,

This is the first of what I would like to be many contributions to our fine organization. I have made a promise that every Christmas I would make a donation. Hopefully as I age and am more able, the donations will be bigger. Please keep up the good work and dedication for the good of our planet.

Emeryville,

This is in response to Steve's challenge. All the Best in 1993!

## FROM AUDUBON ADVENTURE STUDENTS

Dear Audubon Society—

I had fun at the marsh. If you put buildings on the marsh, the animals will lose their homes. They should be able to live in their natural habitat.

OTIS

Dear Audubon Society—

I liked when we saw crabs and learned about them. The birds wouldn't have a place to stop when they went south for the winter if we didn't have marshes. Please save them.

MATTHEW

Dear Audubon Society—

For a class field trip we went to two different wet lands: a marsh and a beach. Altogether I saw two Great White Egrets and two Great Blue Herons. They were beautiful. I think the wetlands should be saved because they were not polluted now and I want them to stay that way.

ALEX

Dear Audubon Society—

When I went to the marsh with my class we saw a deer that was eating plants. We were all still and quiet so we would not scare the deer away. We saw many other animals that only live here. We need to save the wetlands so that the animals have a place to live and have their own families. So please save the wetlands.

a Marshland friend—MAX

## LETTERS

Berkeley,

Dear Barbara Deutsch

I, too, am the owner of a beautiful cat adopted seven years ago. My cat never goes outdoors. My veterinarian's several cats also never go out of doors. If I correctly understand your letter to the San Francisco Commission on Animal Care and Control, as reprinted in *The GULL*, your cat DOES spend time outside, and KILLS BIRDS when it is outside.

I love cats. I am also utterly familiar with cat behavior and I know that a cat that spends time outside will learn to kill birds. A cat supposedly restricted "to its own premises" will kill birds on its own premises. Moreover, cats that live outside generally have a reduced life-span relative to indoor cats. I can tell you from experience that a cat can spend its entire life indoors and be perfectly healthy and happy. And a cat that has spent its life outdoors can adjust to living indoors. There is therefore no reason at all for you or any of your neighbors to allow your cats outside.

Perhaps I should also mention that I put out about 50 pounds of birdseed a month. Cats that venture into the vicinity of my feeding station are met with negative reinforcement.

—ELLEN M. CLARK

San Francisco,

For twenty years now we have been vacationing and visiting Humboldt Co. around the South Fork of the Eel River.

On Nov. 25 around 2:30 p.m. we spotted our first-ever mature Bald Eagle cruising down the River. We were on the frontage road at the southmost Percy exit heading toward Percy. We had to stop and turn around to watch the eagle. What a surprise.

—CURTIS &amp; LINDA BRANCH

San Francisco,

While browsing through past issues of *The GULL* last night, I came across a little article by DMS who described actions of an Anna's Hummingbird at a birdbath.

Bird behavior is always interesting and often surprising. I've never seen the resident Anna's Hummingbirds on Collingwood Hill at a birdbath, but they love the spray of the lawn sprinkler. They apparently come at the sound from the sprinkler, and they will dart in and out of the spray or hover in it for long periods. But they seem to love most the water that collects on the leaves of the boxwood hedge or in the hollows of the curved citrus leaves. They seem to use the tiny boxwood leaves as washcloths and they wriggle and wallow in them. The citrus leaves are larger, and they trap more water. Often the birds seem to slide right down the leaf and eject out at the bottom as the leaf droops from their weight and their splashing. It looks like fun and I'd join them if possible.

Late one afternoon this summer I went out to sprinkle the lawn a bit and walked into the yard where I decided to first go down into the lower garden and check on a lemon tree that was fighting for its life. Walking to the garden gate I was suddenly confronted by an Anna's Hummingbird that hovered steady before me and blocked my path. I paused and waited. It was quite near, only a matter of a few feet away, and it was looking at me with the curiosity that hummingbirds seem to have. I waited. I waited. Finally the bird moved to perch on a twig that overhung the gate. I decided to abandon my trip to the lower garden. Thinking the bird might be waiting for the spray, I walked over to the faucet and dragged out the sprinkler and placed it near the bird and then went back and turned on the water. All this was within a few feet of the bird but it never budged during the hustle and bustle required to set up the sprinkler. When the water was turned on and the spray curving over the lawn and the nearby lime tree, I retreated to the house and set up my scope to watch. I set a timer to see how long the bath would take. To my surprise, the hummingbird sat on the twig for a full ten minutes, its head pointed at the water as if to observe the

spray. Finally it darted into the spray and alternated darting with hovering. After that it spent five minutes bathing in the pools gathered in the lime tree. One branch which pointed upward at a steep angle was clothed in large leaves that formed a whorl at the end. The hummingbird would hover above the whorl briefly and then dive into its center that would have delighted Esther Williams. It did this over and over. The whole episode lasted about 25 minutes, before the bird took off (presumably) to alert its mate. I've noticed that shortly after the bird flies away, a more timid bird appears to investigate the water, though it does not display the calm daring of the first bird.

A favorite perching spot of our resident hummingbirds is the topmost twig on the immense redwood at the bottom of the garden. They share the top with a fine array of birds including an occasional raven. The flock of parrots from Dolores Park often fly by screeching as they go, but once a medium sized parrot, bright green, perched silently on a nearby cypress. I put my binoculars on it to observe it and was greeted by the sight of a hummingbird that flew in to observe it also. The two stayed beak to beak for what seemed to be an eternity. It was an interesting sight and an amusing contrast of birds.

Once as I was changing feeders, a hummingbird flew in as I reached out to remove the old bottle. The bird paused and hovered before me trying to decide on which feeder to choose, the one in my hand or the one hanging from the hook. These little birds are absolutely fearless.

Once when I was sitting inside reading near the door, a hummingbird flew in, looked me over and then went back outside.

Sometimes my cup runneth over.

—CECIL W. BLANK

## **GGAS NEEDS YOU TO HOST AT AUDUBON CANYON RANCH, WE PROMISE YOU'LL ENJOY IT.**

Each year Golden Gate Audubon Society members act as hosts at Audubon Canyon Ranch for one month out of ACR's season. This year we have the month of May, hosting on the weekends of May 1, 2, May 8, 9, May 15, 16, May 22, 23 and May 29, 30.

Hosting is a very pleasurable, and not very demanding, activity. While you're viewing the nesting egrets and herons and all the other wildlife in Bolinas Lagoon (an osprey every day), you will meet lots of interesting people and help introduce them to the Ranch. You'll be briefed ahead of time and it's a great opportunity to learn a lot more about the natural history of Bolinas Lagoon.

You will be joined by other GGAS members to help you do the hosting, so there will be plenty of time for you to walk the trails and have a picnic lunch.

May is one of the nicest months at ACR. The chick's are still in the nest, some just learning to fly and the weather is great.

Please join us at the Ranch, it's beautiful, satisfying and all for one of our Chapter's proudest achievements, Audubon Canyon Ranch.

Please call the office at (510) 843-222 to reserve your place on one of the dates mentioned above. We're looking forward to hosting with you.

## **CALIFORNIA AUDUBON MEETING AND LOBBYING BOOTCAMP IN MARCH**

The National Audubon's Western Regional Office will host a three day meeting of California Audubon chapter and Audubon members near Folsom, CA, on March 20-21-22. There will be presentations and workshops on a variety of conservation issues of state-wide interest. Training in legislative lobbying



techniques will be provided, and those interested will have an opportunity to try newly honed skills when we descend on the Capitol to lobby our legislators on Monday, March 22. Look for details in *The GULL* for March. Members are very welcome, and are urged to attend.

## NEW IN OUR LIBRARY

*The Visitor's Guide to the Birds of the Eastern National Parks*, Roland H. Wauer, John Muir Publications, Santa Fe. \$15.95.

*After Each Day*, Max Oelschlaeger, Univeristy of North Texas Press, \$15.95.

*Birder's Guide to Northern California*, Lolo and Jim Werstrich, Gulf Publishing Co., Houston. (\$?)

*A Naturalists' Mexico*, Roland H. Wauer, Texas A&M Univeristy, College Station, (\$?)

*A Season at the Point*, Jack Connor, Atlantic Monthly Press, New York \$11.95.

## NEWS FROM OUR RANCH

Audubon Canyon Ranch (415) 868-9244  
Shoreline Hwy., Stinson Beach, CA 94970  
Wildlife Sanctuaries & Centers for Nature Education under joint sponsorship of Golden Gate, Madrone, Marin and Sequoia Audubon Societies  
Gary Holloway, President

**GOLDEN GATE REPRESENTATIVES ON THE AUDUBON CANYON RANCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Steven Margolin, ex officio  
Nicki Spillane

Dan Murphy  
Bruce Walker

## EXCEL APPROVED

At our December board meeting, the directors of Audubon Canyon Ranch approved an entirely new concept in environmental education — EXCEL (Cross-cultural environmental leaders). Like so much else in ACR's history, EXCEL is unprecedented, innovative and exciting.

About four years ago board member Eleanor Decker, ACR staff members and several volunteer docents and board members began to explore the potential for expanding our education program to serve secondary school students. The process was slow, arduous and

sometimes frustrating. But the plan which resulted, with the partnership of Beth Hunning and our friends at the National Audubon Society Richardson Bay Sanctuary, promises to offer a wonderful opportunity to a core of interested high school students. That opportunity is to help some young people become the environmental leaders of the next century.

EXCEL will recruit 20 high school juniors who have an interest in natural history of the environment. Their education will include natural history, environmental action, cross cultural understanding and leadership. Educational services will be provided by EXCEL staff, the staff and volunteers from ACR and from the staff of the NAS Richardson Bay Sanctuary. Following the education phase, students will help teach children who attend San Rafael summer day camp. They will also participate in teaching younger children at the Richardson Bay Sanctuary's Bay Shore Studies Program. We hope to develop a group of mentors from the environmental community and from our sponsoring Audubon chapters who will be role models and individual counselors for our students.

Another phase of the EXCEL program will be to track students toward higher education programs in biological sciences and the environment. During their senior year in high school, students will be offered the opportunity to visit college and university campuses from Santa Cruz to Eureka. EXCEL staff will counsel students and help them apply for scholarships.

This project will be funded entirely by a grant from the Marin Community Foundation. It will be staffed by three employees. We hope to employ staff by late spring and begin the program in the fall of 1993. Copies of the proposal are available by calling Nancy.

## LAST CHANCE: RANCH GUIDE TRAINING

The first session for the Ranch Guide class of '93 will be held on Feb. 6. Do you still have time to join? Call Edris at (415) 868-9244 to find out.

**GUIDED NATURE WALKS** at the Bouverie Audubon Preserve continue. Now is the time to plan a spring visit on March 13 or 27, or on April 3 or 17. All walks begin at 9:30 a.m. and end at 1:30 p.m. and are led by one of our BAP docents. Make reservations at (707) 938-4554.

**THE EXPERTS TALK TICKS** will surely get you ready for another year of hiking in oaks and grasslands while trying to avoid Lyme Disease. This symposium will be held at the Bolinas Lagoon Preserve on Friday evening, Feb. 26. There is a \$5 fee. Call Edris at (415) 868-9244 to register.

**VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

As always volunteer opportunities abound at ACR. We will need hosts during our public season. We seem to have a particular problem getting help on holidays and during July. We will be studying heron populations, shorebird migration, harbor seals, pond life and we will certainly be working on our native plant restoration projects. Invest a little of your time, your interest will be discovery and knowledge. To volunteer just call Edris at (415) 868-9244.

—DAN MURPHY

**GIFTS and BEQUESTS**

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George Peyton  
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**In Memory of**

Edward V. Wallace, truly  
a "Rare Bird"

Chip Haven &  
Jane F. Becker-Haven

**FOR AUDUBON CANYON RANCH**

**In Memory of**

Blanche & Gordon Rogers

John & Polly Thomas

The Society welcomes gifts in general or gifts in honor of or in memory of relatives and friends. Such gifts will be used as specified by the donor or, if unspecified, at the discretion of the GGAS Board of Directors. This includes their use for general GGAS activities or for special programs of the Society including Audubon Canyon Ranch of which GGAS is a sponsor. Please send your gift in the form of a check made out to Golden Gate Audubon Society, 2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702. All gifts are tax deductible. The Society is also appreciative of any bequests. Such bequests should specify as recipient the Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc. All gifts, donations and bequests will be acknowledged in *The Gull* as well as personally on behalf of the Society by the Secretary.



## THE GULL

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